CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A pre-feeder apparatus for use in guiding and hoisting a sail on a stay of a sailboat, the sail having a luff, comprising a first jaw member for receiving the luff of the sail, a second jaw member opposing the first jaw member, the second jaw member being movable between an open position and a closed position relative to the first jaw member, wherein the first and second jaw members form an opening between them for partially encircling the luff.

2. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first and second jaw members have opposing ends, the opposing ends having a gap therebetween when the jaw members are in the closed position.

3. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 2, wherein the gap ranges from about 1 millimeter to about 100 millimeters.

4. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 2, wherein the opposing ends of the jaw members are disposed at an angle that diverges away from the gap and the opening between the jaw members.

5. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 2, further comprising means for adjusting the gap between the first and second jaw members.

6. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 5, wherein the adjusting means comprises a screw having a first end, a second end and a threaded portion, the threaded portion being attached to one of the

jaw members with the first end being engaged in a receiving device in the remaining jaw member and the second end enabling rotation of the screw about its longitudinal axis.

7. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first and second jaw members slidably engage the luff in the closed position of the jaw members.

8. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first and second jaw members have opposing ends comprising a surface designed for contact with the sail.

9. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 8, wherein the contact surface comprises a rounded surface.

10. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 8, wherein the contact surface comprises at least one roller.

11. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 1, further comprising attachment means for attaching the pre-feeder apparatus to the sailboat.

12. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 11, wherein said attachment means comprises an eyelet extending through the first jaw member and a flexible strand looped through the eyelet and knotted.

13. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 12, wherein said attachment means is selected from the group consisting of rope, line, and cable.

14. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 11, wherein said attachment means comprises an arm having a longitudinal axis and being flexibly attached to the pre-feeder apparatus, the arm being rotatable about its longitudinal axis.

15. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 14, wherein said arm comprises at least one articulatable joint.

16. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 11, wherein said attachment means allows the pre-feeder to move relative to the sail.

17. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 11, wherein said attachment means is connected to the sailboat at a location selected from the group consisting of the gunwale, forestay, deck, and cleats.

18. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 1, further comprising a hinge connecting the second jaw member to the first jaw member.

19. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 18, further comprising means for biasing the second jaw member to the closed position.

20. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 19, wherein the biasing means comprises a spring.

21. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 18, further comprising ratchet means for enabling the second jaw member to be urged toward the open position in discrete intervals.

22. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 1, further comprising means for locking the second jaw member in the closed position.

23. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 22, wherein the means for locking the second jaw member in the closed position comprises a cutout in one of the jaw members, a locking pin extending through the jaw members and having a stop thereon for engaging in the cutout, the locking pin being movable between a locked position with the stop engaged in the cutout to retain the jaw members in their closed position and an unlocked position with the stop disengaged from the cutout to permit the second jaw member to be articulated to the open position.

24. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 23, further comprising a groove in the one jaw member, the locking pin passing through the groove and being movably guided in the groove when the stop is disengaged from the cutout and the second jaw member is articulated to the open position.

25. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 23, further comprising a resilient element having a biasing force urging the locking pin to its locked position.

26. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 25, further comprising means for adjusting the biasing force of the resilient element.

27. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 26, wherein the locking pin comprises a threaded screw with a screw head and the resilient element comprises a spring arranged concentrically on the threaded screw between the screw head and one of the jaw members, the adjusting means comprising the threaded screw and a thread in the stop for adjusting the distance between the screw head and the one jaw member.

28. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 27, further comprising a resilient cover enclosing the screw head and resilient element.

29. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 1, further comprising gripping portions on the jaw members for manually gripping the jaw members.

30. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first and second jaw members are each made of one or more materials selected from the group consisting of Delrin, carbon fiber, titanium, stainless steel, aluminum, and bronze.

31. A pre-feeder apparatus for use in guiding and hoisting a sail on a forestay of a sailboat, the sail having a luff, comprising first and second jaw members for receiving the luff of the sail, and a pivot member pivotally connecting the jaw members in opposing relationship, the jaw members being pivotable relative to each other between open and closed positions, the first and second jaw members forming an opening and a gap between them for slidably engaging the luff in the closed position of the jaw members.

32. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 31, further comprising means for biasing the first and second jaw members to the closed position.

33. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 32, wherein the biasing means comprises a spring.

34. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 31, further comprising ratchet means for enabling the jaw members to be urged toward the open position in discrete intervals.

35. The apparatus of claim 31, further comprising attachment means for securing the pre-feeder apparatus to the sailboat.

36. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 35, wherein said attachment means comprises an eyelet extending through one of the jaw members and a flexible strand looped through the eyelet and knotted.

37. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 36, wherein said attachment means is selected from the group consisting of rope, line, and cable.

38. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 35, wherein said attachment means comprises an arm having a longitudinal axis and being flexibly attached to the pre-feeder apparatus, the arm being rotatable about its longitudinal axis.

39. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 38, wherein said arm comprises at least one articulatable joint.

40. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 35, wherein said attachment means allows the pre-feeder to move relative to the sail.

41. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 35, wherein said attachment means is connected to the sailboat at a location selected from the group consisting of the gunwale, forestay, deck, and cleats.

42. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 31, further comprising gripping portions on the jaw members for manually gripping the jaw members.

43. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 42, wherein the pivot member is positioned approximately near the center of the pre-feeder and the gripping members being pivotable relative to each other between open and closed positions whereby application of opening force to the gripping portions causes the jaw members to be urged toward the open position and application of closing force to the gripping portions causes the jaw members to be urged toward the closed position.

44. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 31, wherein the gap ranges from about 1 millimeter to about 100 millimeters.

45. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 31, wherein the first and second jaw members have opposing ends disposed at an angle that diverges away from the gap and the opening between the jaw members.

46. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 31, further comprising means for adjusting the gap between the first and second jaw members.

47. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 46, wherein the adjusting means comprises a screw having a first end, a second end and a threaded portion, the threaded portion being attached to one of the jaw members with the first end being engaged in a receiving device in the remaining jaw member and the second end enabling rotation of the screw about its longitudinal axis.

48. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 31, wherein the first and second jaw members are each made of one or more materials selected from the group consisting of Delrin, carbon fiber, titanium, stainless steel, aluminum, and bronze.

49. A pre-feeder apparatus for use in guiding and hoisting a sail on a forestay of a sailboat, the sail having a luff, comprising first and second jaw members for receiving the luff of the sail, and a pin parallel to the plane of the pre-feeder connecting the jaw members in opposing relationship, the jaw members being slidable relative to each other between open and closed positions, the first and second jaw members forming an opening and a gap between them for slidably engaging the luff in the closed position of the jaw members.

50. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 49, further comprising means for biasing the first and second jaw members to the closed position.

51. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 50, wherein the biasing means comprises a spring.

52. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 49, further comprising means for locking the jaw members in the closed position.

53. The apparatus of claim 49, further comprising attachment means for securing the pre-feeder apparatus to the sailboat.

54. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 49, further comprising gripping portions on the jaw members for manually gripping the jaw members.

55. A pre-feeder apparatus for use in guiding and hoisting a sail on a stay of a sailboat, the sail having a luff, comprising first and second jaw members for receiving the luff of the sail, said first and second jaw members forming an opening between them for slidably engaging the luff of the sail when said first and second jaw members are in a closed position, said first jaw member being articulatable relative to the second jaw member between an open position enabling the luff to be inserted into said opening between said first and second jaw members and a closed position holding said luff within said opening.

56. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 55, further comprising means for locking the jaw members in the closed position.

57. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 55, wherein the means for locking the jaw members in the closed position comprises a cutout in one of the jaw members, a locking pin extending through the jaw members and having a stop thereon for engaging in the cutout, the locking pin being movable between a locked position with the stop engaged in the cutout to retain the jaw members in their closed position and an unlocked position with the stop disengaged from the cutout to permit the jaw members to be articulated to their open position.

58. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 57, including a resilient element having a biasing force urging the locking pin to its locked position.

59. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 58, including means for adjusting the biasing force of the resilient element.

60. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 59, wherein the locking pin is a threaded screw with a screw head and the resilient element is a spring arranged concentrically on the threaded screw between the screw head and one of the jaw members, the adjusting means comprising the threaded screw and a thread in the stop for adjusting the distance between the screw head and the one jaw member.

61. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 55, including a hinge connecting the first and second jaw members.

62. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 55, further comprising attachment means for attaching the pre-feeder apparatus to the sailboat.

63. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 55, further comprising gripping portions on the jaw members for manually gripping the jaw members.

64. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 55, further comprising means for biasing the first and second jaw members to the closed position.

65. The pre-feeder apparatus of claim 64, wherein the biasing means comprises a spring.